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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000389

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE

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SUBJECT: POLES FACE EC DELAY, DIVISION ON EASTERN
PARTNERSHIP

Classified By: CDA QUANRUD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. We reviewed developments in Poland's Eastern neighborhood in separate meetings with Witold Sobkow, MFA Acting Political Director, and Jacek Cichocki, Secretary of State in the Polish Prime Minister's Chancellery. They noted that:

-- The EU is still divided on the issue of inviting Lukashenka to the May 7 launch of the Eastern Partnership Initiative. A compromise may emerge to invite Lukashenka... somewhere else in Europe on May 7 to help him save face;

-- there is a growing worry that Nagorno-Karabakh will erupt as the next flash point in the Caucasus if Azerbaijan were sufficiently provoked;

-- Prime Minister Tusk has lost faith in Georgian President Saakashvili, who the Poles believe is losing touch with reality; and

-- the Tusk Government has so far failed to refocus bickering Ukrainian politicians on fixing the economy and resuming NATO accession efforts. END SUMMARY.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION STALLED ON EASTERN
PARTNERSHIP... AND EVERYTHING ELSE

12. (C) Sobkow said the European Council Summit's approval of EUR 600 million in Eastern Partnership (EP) funding became possible once the Poles convinced Spanish FM Moratinos that the funding would not take away from EU monies for the Mediterranean. Poland showed that the allotments would comply with the agreed 69/31 split for South/East projects. This is not new money, but a reprogramming of funds from European Neighborhood bilateral projects into the EP multilateral projects.

13. (C) We noted that the Secretary had discussed with Foreign Minister Sikorski coordination with the EU's Eastern Partnership (EP), and asked how this might manifest itself. Sobkow welcomed the interest in coordination, but said the program is now in the European Commission's hands. The Commission is working out technical guidelines on cooperation with third countries, he said, and it is too early to consult about actual programs. Sobkow said Commissioners are all focused on the upcoming elections, and would "do nothing" -- on the EP or anything else -- until the fall. Moreover, the ongoing crises in almost all of the EP countries gave the Commission an excuse to "wait and see" what develops.

BELARUS: SHOW LUKASHENKA AN OUTSTRETCHED HAND?

14. (C) Sobkow said the EU is completely divided on whether to invite Lukashenka to the May 7 launching of the EP. Holland is against, Italy in favor; France wants to invite Lukashenka, but not shake his hand. Lukashenka has reportedly urged the EU to invite him but promised not to attend. Sobkow said the EU hoped to reach a compromise by the Luxembourg GAERC meeting April 27-28, perhaps offering Lukashenka a meeting in another venue while the EP launching ceremony takes place. Cichocki, from the Prime Minister's Chancellery, said the U.S. and Europe need a common policy toward Belarus, so Lukashenka cannot pit allies against each other.

AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA: THE NEXT FLASH POINT?

15. (C) Cichocki warned there was a 10-15 percent chance that the Nagorno-Karabakh situation could significantly deteriorate. He said "certain parties" -- a probable reference to Russia -- might try to provoke Azerbaijan into an open conflict with Armenia. Given the occasional exchange of fire, Azerbaijan would be easy to provoke. Cichocki argued that Baku is accumulating weapons and that President Aliyev felt increasingly vulnerable to criticism of his inability to resolve the frozen conflict. Cichocki said Armenia was leaning towards the West, but there were some individuals who would do anything to gain power, which could destabilize the region.

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GEORGIA: LOST FAITH IN SAAKASHVILI

16. (C) Echoing the sentiment of Polish FM Radoslaw Sikorski, Cichocki bluntly declared that Prime Minister Tusk had lost faith in Georgian President Saakashvili. According to Cichocki, Saakasvili has lost touch with reality and his actions in August undermined years of work to resolve the frozen conflicts in that country. Cichocki argued that the EP would probably fail to push Saakashvili -- who Cichocki claimed only cared about power and money -- in the right direction.

UKRAINE: DISTRACTED BY INTERNAL BICKERING

17. (C) Cichocki told us that Tusk maintained good relations with Ukrainian Prime Minister Tymoshenko, but she and other Ukrainian politicians were completely distracted by internal political bickering. Tusk and his cabinet are actively trying to refocus Ukrainians on important issues like the financial crisis and preparations for NATO membership, but to no avail. Cichocki expressed hope that the upcoming elections in Ukraine would put an end to internal disputes (and the "endless electioneering"), but he feared that the population was fatigued with the political system and might not participate vigorously in the electoral process.

QUANRUD